



**Governor's Proposed Budget FY16-FY17
Appropriations Hearing
Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services
Wednesday, February 18th, 2016**

Senator Bye, Senator Kane, Representative Walker, Representative Ziobron, and Members of the Committee, thank you for hearing my testimony today on the important investments through the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services to support efforts to end homelessness in CT.

We are making significant progress towards our goal of ending homelessness in Connecticut, through the unprecedented support of Governor Malloy, the legislature, the Department of Housing, and the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services.

Connecticut became the first state in the nation recognized by the federal government for ending chronic homelessness among Veterans in 2014. Connecticut is on track in the *Zero: 2016* Campaign to end chronic homelessness (the long-term homelessness of people with severe disabilities) by the end of this year. Through terrific work across the state, we reduced by 30% from 2014 to 2015 the number of people experiencing chronic homelessness.

We know what works to end chronic homelessness: permanent supportive housing, which combines housing subsidy with case management services. Permanent supportive housing is highly effective at ending once and for all the homelessness of those who need this assistance. And it is proven to save communities up to 70% of the costs they will otherwise incur when chronic homelessness persists.

Supportive services for those who enter permanent supportive housing are provided under the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. These services are a critical component of keeping these high-need individuals housed and stable.

Here are only a few stories of those that have dramatically changed their lives with access to permanent supportive housing:

Meet Alfredo Rivera "Shorty"

Alfredo Rivera was a sinewy middle aged man living in a camp by the river for years. He kept to himself, was estranged from his brother and was untrusting of strangers. He especially disliked coming to Chrysalis to meet with case managers to discuss housing

and his future. He really just wanted to be left alone because as he put it “nobody really cares”.

In May Alfredo was arrested for possession of narcotics and was assigned a probation officer he did not want to meet. He was reluctant to go but alongside his case manager, met his probation officer. She mandated he attend an intensive outpatient program for his chemical dependency. Discouraged and feeling like he was losing control, he did not want to attend IOP. Again with the encouragement of his case manager, he went.

It took a while to house Shorty, but on September 1st 2015, he moved into his first one bedroom apartment located in a quiet neighborhood in West Hartford. When volunteers came to furnish his apartment he said “who are all these people, I don’t want them in my house” to which I said, “They already know where you live, at least let them give you furniture”! By the end of the interaction, Shorty was a bit more relaxed and even joked with the volunteers he was initially upset with.

Over the course of the next couple of months, Alfredo continued to attend both his probation appointments and IOP on his own. He was learning a lot from both resources and had decided it was time to quit. He reported his relationship with his brother had improved and was on the mend.

Today is January 21, 2016. I spoke to Shorty to confirm a home visit. He said we’d have to reschedule because he was in Newington running errands with his brother. He also said he needed new pants because he was getting fat! Alfredo now comes to Chrysalis just to say hi and check in. He regales me with stories about his latest IOP session and how he looks forward to going each week. He asks about support groups and states interest in going to the REC. He communicates and is open to discussion about his issues.

Alfredo has had a lot of hurdles but since has changed from a person who believed the world did not care to hear his story to one who can’t wait to share it.

Meet Salvatore Pinna ‘Sal’

Sal is special for a number of reasons. Sal was the very first participant to be housed by the CABHI Team.

In the mid 90’s Sal’s mother died. He left his native Long Island and made his way to Hartford. He had been homeless for over 20 years! Sal still has family in New York; however, he only had sporadic contact with the various distant relatives. Sal was truly alone.

Sal lives with developmental issues, diabetes, and bipolar disorder. Sal is also a Batman and Mets enthusiast.

Early last year Sal was staying at Hartford's 'no freeze' shelter, but when it's funding ran out on March 31 2015 he and 49 other men were forced out to the streets. Sal did not want to seek another shelter. He slept outside, but refused to let anyone know where exactly he was sleeping. Sal called the life the rest of us live....(and complain about) 'a normal life'. He would often ask, "When will I get a normal life?"

For Sal, 'normal' meant a kitchen, a television, and a door he could lock behind him. On April 23, 2015, Sal got that 'normal' life he had been yearning for. On April 23, 2015 he signed his lease to an apartment on Hartford's West end. Despite only having his sleeping bag and a few toiletries, Sal stayed in his apartment that night.

I will never forget visiting him early Friday April 24, 2015. The apartment was bare, just a few pillows and a sleeping bag. I asked him how he slept last night, and without hesitation he said, "That was the BEST night's sleep I've had in a long long time!" I asked if I could sit down, plopped myself on the floor and we finished up paperwork and made plans.

One of the first things we did was go to Walmart with a small stipend provided to us by Journey Home. He took his time choosing colors, styles, and of course Batman sheets! Fast forward to January 2016.....in less than a year here are a few things that Sal has been up to:

Sal's apartment remains meticulous. He opted on a black couch with yellow throw cushions.....why? Batman colors of course!

He now has food stamps; he has a resume and has been applying for jobs. Over the holiday's Sal worked as a greeter at Walmart. While he was disappointed that he was only hired for seasonal work, he remains positive. What did Sal do with the paychecks from Walmart? Bought a Batman jacket of course!! He also started by putting \$200 in a savings account. Sal will be successfully completing CABHI January 23, 2016, but he will remain part of the Chrysalis family. He will continue to work with CABHI'S employment specialist and receive case management.

Most importantly, Sal will continue to live his 'normal' life.

Meet Steven Rogers, Steve

Steve Just turned 50 on January 20, 2016! Steven has been homeless 'On and off' for about 12 years. In those 12 years he has never had a permanent address. The longest he was able to maintain any sort of stable housing was about a month.

Steven came to the CABHI team in early July. He also had just completed a 7 day DETOX at Blue Hills. This was a great start, but Steve needed a considerable amount more of treatment. Steve has been struggling with addiction and mental illness since the age of 15. At this time it was alcohol. Steve was in and out of shelters, hospital emergency rooms, DETOX, mental health facilities.....and of course my favorite storage units!

Steve was discharged from Blue Hills and was ready to be housed. The CCABHI Team encouraged him to stay one of the local shelters while searching for a place to live. Steve declined. Initially our thoughts were that he was being stubborn, but as we got to know Steve better, the more he opened up about what he has been through, not just the last 12 years of homelessness, but most of his life. Most recently Steve had been 'turned'. He was mugged. The little cash he had, identification, food stamp card, everything was gone again....he would have to start from scratch all over again.

With the assistance of the CABHI Team all that was completed. Steve signed his housing certification and appeared ready to be housed. He struggled with his sobriety, openly admitted when he relapsed, but did not want to return to treatment. Our Peer Support Specialist would meet with Steve, continue to encourage him to attend meetings, and provide him with meeting dates and times. Steve would just say no thanks and that meetings were not for him.

Things started to look up for Steve. He got a part time job at an auto mechanic shop and after having been estranged from his family, his sister reached out to him and the CABHI team. She was nervous, but set limits and boundaries. Then at the beginning of August Steve signed his lease!! Everyone (especially Steve) was thrilled. He only had to wait 2 days for the security deposit to come through. Well in those 2 days, Steve returned to the apartment complex.....drunk.....actually very very very DRUNK. The owner said he could not allow this on his property. He lost the apartment and his job in a matter of about 3 hours.

We were all heartbroken. Steve literally took off. We would call his cell. Occasionally, he would answer, but he said very little, just that he needed some time alone. We called the shelters daily in hopes that he would go to one for at least a shower.....nothing. He wouldn't even contact his sister.

One day in mid to late September, his sister called us. She was panicked, frustrated, and overwhelmed. She had not seen or heard from her brother in over 3 weeks. She went to his storage unit hoping that he was sleeping there. There was no sign of him. She was inconsolable when she called. On a hunch at 4:00PM the housing coordinator knew Steve had obtained a 'new storage' unit. She was worried and felt terribly for his sister. She asked the Program Manager to go with her to the storage unit

We traveled out to the 'new' storage unit in search of Steve. Sarah was eagerly nervous. She thought she had the code to the unit, but when we arrived it was the wrong code. Sensing her apprehension we went to the manager of the storage place. We expressed concern for Steve, but without a release of information we couldn't go into any detail. He assured us he had seen Steve earlier that day. We must have both appeared pretty pitiful because he agreed to take us up there and look 'just in case'.

When we got up there the stench was horrible. I've been doing this for a long time....but the funky smell was even concerning to me. The lock to the unit was on backwards, which is indicative of someone staying there. When he opened the storage unit door, all of a sudden this pair of legs just flopped out. Sarah Simonelli could be an Olympic runner!! I have never seen anyone run so fast. She and the manager to the storage unit then collided. The program manager and all her experience jumped up and down screaming in a pitch so high that it would probably break glass. Finally, Steve just said 'Hi'. The storage unit was indescribable. It made an episode of Hoarders look like a picture from Better Homes and Garden. The smell? Since I think dinner is being provided tonight, I won't even go into that.

Steve was TREMENDOUSLY drunk! We tried to encourage him to let us call an ambulance, but he refused and threatened to run off. From head to toe Steve was really in rough shape. The program manager and Sarah finally got Steve to agree to go with them and just get 'checked out' at the hospital. We finally made it to the hospital, but they wouldn't admit Steve unless Steve himself stated he wanted treatment. His blood pressure was sky high, the emergency room staff were concerned he would have a heart attack.....I was about to have a heart attack!! After about 5 minutes (which felt more like 5 hours) Steve reluctantly said that yes, he needed treatment!

We called his family and gave them the latest update. He would at least at Blue Hills till Monday. That means he would at least have 2 days without alcohol. Each additional day of sobriety helped. Steve called me a few days later and asked that I not forget about him, because after all he was special and gave me my first Halloween scare of the year....Thanks Steve! After a 28 day treatment Blue Hills gave Steve the option to continue with treatment at Lebanon Pines for 3 to 4 months or be discharged.

After a long talk with Sarah (and I swear to this day I don't know how she did it) Steve committed to additional treatment at Lebanon Pines.

In a month we already noticed a difference in Steve. He sounds confident and strong. He sent us a list of places he had researched and would like to reside in. He went out on a day pass last week and secured an apartment. On February 8, 2016 Steven successfully graduated from Lebanon Pines and moved into her new permanent supportive housing apartment. Steven is actively engaged with his case manager and remains clean and sober.

Working with our partners in the Reaching Home Campaign and at the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness, we have worked hard to develop comprehensive data regarding what we need to end chronic homelessness. **We ask for your support for the additional 150 units of permanent supportive housing required this year to make our goal.**

Homelessness is an unacceptable condition for any Connecticut resident, and an expensive public policy problem. Investments in permanent supportive housing save public resources, and help those most need transition to housing, stability, and hope.

Thanks for hearing my testimony.

Sincerely,

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